

Lessons learnt from tackling fuel poverty in Wales

THE 70+ CYMRU **PROJECT**

Funded by

Energy Redress and Wales & West Utilities.





At a time of unprecedented energy costs and a wider cost of living crisis, we have been seeking third parties who can offer a range of support to ensure people are not afraid to put the heating on, are able to eat, and maintain their health. When approached about providing gap funding for the 70+ Cymru scheme, we had no hesitation in offering our support to ensure this service continued through winter 2022/23. Care & Repair Cymru have built a great project and team that is reaching thousands of homes. The range of support provided both for energy and home adaptions has huge impact for people keeping them safe and warm in their homes. This is evidenced well through data and individual case studies."

Nigel Winnan,

Wales & West Utilities, Customer Service & Social Obligations Manager



Our organisation has received a lot of help and support [from 70+ Cymru] for the vulnerable and elderly clients of our organisation. This has been provided through awareness seminars, home visits, grants and referrals, addressing the issue of fuel poverty. We would like to thank the team for their wonderful work during these very difficult times."

Amal Beyrouty, Women Connect First, Project Manager

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The number of tips they had to offer that cost pennies but would save pounds was such a boost to our members."

Yvonne Peters, Llantrisant and District 50+ Forum

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INTRODUCTION

This report highlights the successes and the significant learning gathered from Care & Repair Cymru's 70+ Cymru project. The award-winning service ran from 2021-2023 and was the only Wales-wide project dedicated to tackling fuel poverty among older people in the private housing sector.

70+ Cymru Aimed To:

- reduce the incidence and impact of fuel poverty on older energy consumers in Wales
- target home energy advice and technical housing solutions to older people at greatest risk
- develop a comprehensive evidence base of effective interventions that improve wellbeing, warmth and health of older people and their homes.

Pulling together the outcomes and learning of the project into one place ensures they can be shared with our partners, third sector organisations and others working to tackle fuel poverty.

If you have any questions about this report and its content please contact Chris Jones, Care & Repair Cymru Chief Executive: chris.jones@careandrepair.org.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are proud of the impact and outcomes the 70+ Cymru team achieved for vulnerable older people across the whole of Wales, and how they addressed the inequalities that so many people struggled with in these difficult times. We are grateful to Energy Redress as the principal funder, and to Wales & West Utilities for enabling us to extend the project from December 2022 to March 2023.

With our team of eight, we reached 2,988 households with advice and support during the project's 30 months. This included almost 1,000 in-person home visits. In total, the value of large energy saving measures installed and financial gains for our clients totalled £1,127,556. Our service delivery methods uniquely supported older people with individually tailored solutions and our strong impact and positive outcomes were achieved during the exceptionally challenging circumstances of a pandemic and cost of living crisis. Throughout 2021 our home visiting service was impacted by Covid restrictions and the impact of the virus itself. While the furlough scheme was operational, we found it difficult to recruit, eventually running five rounds of recruitment which naturally affected our budget and early delivery to target outcomes. Despite this the 70+ Cymru team fulfilled its primary goal of delivering specialist home energy support, advice, and interventions for older energy consumers in the private housing sector; reducing the negative impact of fuel poverty and helping older people stay safe and warm in their own homes.

We learnt that clients valued advice and action that could quickly alleviate the home energy related problems they lived with. Our Home Energy Officers (HEOs) developed trusted relationships that enabled clients to be open about the struggles they faced. The team developed specialist skills through experience, sharing and training that strengthened outcomes and built a respected and consistent fuel poverty service. Each HEO worked tirelessly to challenge and alleviate fuel poverty, working with compassion and professionalism. In January 2023, it was fantastic to celebrate with the team when our achievements were recognised by the Wales Energy Efficiency Awards as 'Best Vulnerable Customer Support Organisation of the Year'.

With fuel poverty still a huge challenge we need to tackle in Wales, over the next six to twelve months, we will conduct further analysis of our 70+ Cymru delivery methods, impact and outcomes, and utilise this data and evidence to support funding applications for Care & Repair to deliver a new national or regional fuel poverty service.

Finally, my thanks to everyone who contributed to and supported 70+ Cymru.



Project Manager

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project employed eight Home Energy Officers (HEOs) each hosted by a Care & Repair Agency and covering a different region of Wales. HEOs visited older owner occupiers and older tenants of private landlords. They provided free advice and technical support with home energy saving techniques and housing improvements, supported access to government and benevolent grants, and challenged inappropriate and unfair practice by energy suppliers.

Client Visit

HEOs would often travel three hours in arduous conditions to reach someone living in an isolated small rural community, or they would travel a few minutes to reach someone feeling equally isolated and in need in a busy town or city.

At each home visit HEOs listened, reassured, and explored issues with clients. Where possible they took immediate steps to relieve or resolve problems. That could have meant making a call to an energy supplier who their client had been unable to contact, or fitting radiator foils and draughtproofing tape to draughty windows.

After each visit the HEO's work continued, whether that be reaching out to trusted contractors to obtain quotes for necessary works, or maybe supporting their client to apply for a grant to the Warm Homes Programme (NEST) or arranging support to help declutter to enable a heating installation, there is no definitive list. HEO would try to do whatever they could to enable clients to stay warm and safe at home.

Home Energy Assessment

As part of every home visit HEOs would carry out a Home Energy Assessment. Our Home Energy Assessment is a tool that was developed over 7 months of delivery and finalised in September 2021. In January 2022, following a trial period we introduced a telephone version. Both assessments were specialised home energy tools that placed clients firmly at the centre, used open questions to explore clients home energy needs and included (home visit only) a roomby-room assessment of heating and warmth led by our client's needs. Each assessment included a wellbeing questionnaire, various checklists for property and fuel types, rooms, income maximisation, energy schemes advice and more.



THE SUCCESSES



Households helped



378 Large measures delivered (E.g., oil tank replacement)



Home visits conducted



1,021 Small measures delivered (E.g., draught proofing)



328 Welfare benefit checks completed



864 Households signed up/ signposted to the Priority Services Register



Households received advice via telephone



£1,127,556 Total value of large measures installed and financial gains for our clients

We reached 2.988 individual households with advice and support over 24 months with a team of eight Home Energy Officers (HEOs), each stretched across wide or heavily populated regions of Wales.

We conducted 979 home visits despite the challenges that the pandemic presented. We gave telephone advice to 1,193 households. This was more than three times the number we had initially anticipated and were targeted to achieve. However, 1,193 demonstrates the continuity of service we provided when clients were uncomfortable with home visits and when some of our agency partners placed home visits on hold at various times in 2021.

We worked hard to commission 212 jobs of crucial energy efficiency work using hardship and benevolent funding for clients who were struggling to stay warm for many reasons. Sometimes these included clients who were eligible for Warm Homes Programme help but who lived in properties in such a poor state of repair that no NEST installation could proceed. Sometimes these included boiler replacements, or oil heating system repairs for clients left without heating, whose incomes were pushed just above the NEST thresholds by their disability benefits. Over the course of the project HEOs became very skilled in finding pots of funding to help support these works.

We advised 931 eligible households about the Warm Homes Discount schemes their suppliers operated, we signposted, advised and/or registered 864 households on the Priority Services Register. We carried out 328 welfare benefit checks resulting in increased income from welfare benefits, grants, social water tariffs and pension credit.

From the start of the project each HEO built relationships with local organisations and community groups, our Project Manager worked with organisations delivering services across the whole of Wales. We knew that to reach people most in need we would need to be accessible and be known. We offered training, workshops, advice sessions and event stalls. As the cost-of-living crisis embedded itself further in 2022, particularly in the last few months of the project, our offers were in demand. In total we formed 85 new partnerships and through our 350 public facing sessions we delivered advice, training and support to 1,386 households. We contributed to 167 fuel poverty and cost of living events along with 1,432 participants (in addition to the 2,988) households we reached with advice, support and training).

Though we were targeted to deliver small measures as part of 70+ Cymru there was no available grant funding to purchase hardware. Our Project Manager and colleagues secured donations of measures, and our partner Care & Repair agencies and the NEST team donated where they could to support the remarkable delivery of 1,021 small measures to 606 households.

In total, through referrals to other organisations, via internal referrals to our Care & Repair partners, and through work commissioned via hardship funding, 378 large measures were delivered. To give some examples, these large measures included removal of poorly installed cavity wall insulation, attic ventilation to prevent condensation and damp, storage heater repairs and replacements, and oil tank replacement.

Where we were able to, we recorded the value of large measures and financial gains for our clients and are delighted with our recorded outcome of £1,127,556 despite the challenges we faced in the project's first year. We believe this figure to be even higher - we were unable to establish the financial value of some works commissioned as a result of the technical casework support the team gave (for example through ECO and ECOFlex schemes).

We contributed to **167** fuel poverty and cost of living events, reaching 1,432 participants (in addition to the 2,988 households we reached with advice, support and training).

SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

We have improved lives, amplified the voices of older people in Wales and drawn attention to major issues that are not being addressed effectively, or are happening under the radar. Our all-Wales fortnightly round tables have identified themes that we have been able to flag and highlight at a national level.

Legitimacy of Energy Saving Solutions

As inflation soared and energy bills skyrocketed, we saw an increase in companies 'greenwashing' products such as spray foam loft insulation. We have encountered several companies that claim to sell an energy saving measure at highly inflated prices that will receive free government grants - allegedly 'saving' customers 50% initially and much more over a lifetime. HEOs became aware of this problem through home visits and from clients and relatives contacting us for advice. As a team we realised it was a more serious issue when sharing at a round table session. One HEO's recent experience was echoed by two others in the same meeting. Salespeople have been pressuring older owner occupiers to pay immediate, large cash deposits with promises that their product would save money on energy bills and would contribute to reducing carbon emissions.

Care & Repair Cymru has reached out to the Older People's Commissioner in Wales and to WASP, the Wales Anti Scam Partnership. Our Project Manager consulted technical officers across the Care & Repair movement, wrote a briefing and drew attention to this risk at national forums and with partners such as CIOB. We have no evidence that the product offered was below standards described though we have not been able to find any UK or Welsh government grants that would cover the work. The claims present risks of inappropriate, unsuitable and potentially damaging insulation at exaggerated prices, plus serious concerns over sales tactics.

When NEST started trialling solar PV and battery storage as part of Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme, we picked up on the trial just a couple of weeks after it began in parts of Wales. Our reputation as a trusted team meant that some clients, who we had supported through the NEST application process, got in touch to verify that the free solar PV offers were genuine.

We have worked with OFGEM's monthly complex case review team to highlight cases where suppliers are letting people down. One case led to us forming a positive and mutually supportive relationship with an energy supplier in northwest Wales that enabled them and us to address complex cases without clients needing to complain or escalate.

Cost of Living Fears

Through late summer and autumn 2022, all HEOs shared stories of the fear and anxiety their clients were expressing at home visits. We adapted under pressure as options to help people make immediate financial and energy savings, such as to switch tariff and suppliers, disappeared overnight. Nevertheless, HEOs relied on using their knowledge and skills to listen to clients' fears, and to help unpick and allay those fears.

Our Project Manager put together a guide to financial help for the cost-of-living crisis with an easy reference table. HEOs used this to reassure clients that some financial help would come their way, they informed clients how and when to expect payments and discussed the importance of staying warm for older people, particularly those living with chronic health conditions. We shared this guide widely with partners and colleagues.

Fuel Poverty VS Decarbonisation

Wales has a very active fuel poverty movement that consists largely of third sector advice agencies, campaigning organisations and energy and water suppliers. At the start of the project, we found that fuel poverty and decarbonisation were mostly considered separate issues that were not being addressed together. The 70+ Cymru team saw how this separation had huge potential to negatively impact people already experiencing fuel poverty well into the future. We were concerned that older people living in Wales' private housing sector would get left behind in the drive to achieve net zero.

Wales has more older and traditional properties (dwellings constructed before 1919) than any other UK nation. Older properties in a poor state of disrepair are thermally inefficient; they cost more to heat than contemporary dwellings and can leak as much warmth as they retain. In the early days of 70+ Cymru, our HEOs highlighted the incongruity they met when they were able to access a new, fully funded gas central heating system for a client but were unable to access any financial help to repair or replace inadequate and draughty windows and doors.

If government funding committed to improving the long-term thermal efficiency of properties as and when it funded new, efficient and low carbon heating options, all citizens would benefit and people in most need would not get left behind.

Care & Repair Cymru's recent report on the state of older people's housing in Wales, highlights the poor conditions of housing, exacerbated by negative impacts of the pandemic on many older people's mobility, health and ability to keep up with housing repairs. You can read this report at www.careandrepair.org.uk/housing2023.

Resource Sharing

Throughout the project we created useful resources not just for clients but also for third sector organisations to utilise. Here are a few that were posted to our website:

- 70+ Cymru: Tackling Fuel Poverty in Wales
- What Does a Free Home Energy **Assessment Look Like?**
- Ten Ways You can Save Energy for under £20
- We're Speaking up for Older People in **Fuel Poverty**
- No Heating at Winter: Christine's Story

70+ Cymru was recognised and listed as a trusted project and a place to obtain specialist advice in guides and reports. We were included in the following:

- Carmarthenshire Local Authority **Hwb Guide**
- NEA / Smart Energy GB Advice for **Managing Energy Bills**
- NEST Annual Report 2021-2022
- Older People's Commissioner November 2022 newsletter

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The most obstructive barriers we faced delivering 70+ Cymru were Covid restrictions, recruitment, case complexity and supplying small energy efficiency measures.

Covid-19 Pandemic

In most parts of Wales, we continued home visit service delivery with Covid testing, PPE, and frequent, robust risk assessments. We introduced telephone check-ins with clients leading up to and on the day of visits. During periods of Covid restrictions we contacted clients to offer home visits, reassuring them of our procedures. Our Home Energy Officers carried out a home Covid test each day they were visiting people, as part of Welsh Government's Workplace Testing programme. Providing regular test results were negative, they telephoned clients a few days before a visit to check that clients were happy to continue. On the day of each visit, HEOs called clients and completed a Covid risk assessment before settling on a decision to visit. Our clients' safety was and continued to be at the forefront of our work.

THE 70+ CYMRU PROJEC

Recruitment

It took from the start of the project in September 2020 to October 2021 to recruit a full team. Spring and summer 2021 saw a slow recruitment market across the UK, we believe this was due to the furlough scheme that ran until September 2021 – people were reluctant to move from roles while they were furloughed. We used social media, team films, offered virtual open days, and Facebook live sessions. However, repeated recruitment drives were costly and ran above our initially anticipated budget quickly.



Case Complexity

In many regions the demand was greater than the team capacity could meet. It became apparent early in the project that our Care & Repair colleagues were referring mostly complex cases to us. This makes sense as the established caseworker teams in lots of areas in Wales are well experienced and well versed in primary fuel poverty resources, information and signposting. The same is true of our external partners, they referred cases to us that their teams could not support (for example Warm Wales and NEST).

Naturally such referrals resulted in longer, more intensive and complex HEO work than we had anticipated. There are numerous other factors that influenced the complexity of cases, such as:

- Wales has the largest percentage of older and traditional properties in the UK
- Older properties require insulation measures that are either very costly to install or that lack the necessary skilled contractors
- Such properties have become too expensive to heat for many people
- Many older and traditional buildings are in rural or isolated communities

- Fuel and water poverty has risen exponentially, (our data shows severe fuel poverty of 20% or higher as average particularly in rural north Wales, even higher in Cardiff at 27%)
- Complex referrals need specialist attention over a long period

These factors combined contributed to the increased demand and limited capacity to deliver household visits, resulting in fewer visits than we had hoped.

We appreciated that this 'case complexity' barrier was not going to disappear and was likely to worsen. So, we accepted it and ensured that we addressed the seemingly insurmountable challenges our clients were facing. 70+ Cymru was the only fuel poverty service in Wales that could address these issues as a movement if we did not alleviate these complexities for clients, there was no other project across the whole of Wales that could.

Small Measures

Our Redress grant did not include an allocation for small measures. We relied on donations from generous partners (thermometers from NEST, radiator foils, hygrometers and draughtproofing tape from Solon, small supplies from some partner agencies).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Our specialist service came to an end on 31 March 2023. Our casework teams in Care & Repair agencies will continue to support clients to access Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme, suppliers' Warm Home Discount and network operators' Priority Services Register.

Over the next year we will conduct a detailed analysis of the databank of information we have collected to share widely. Some examples may include mapping most common problems, property types and affordable remedies; how we used hardship and benevolent funding and what the funding achieved for clients; reference of local community organisations; what mattered to our clients; our clients' comfort and wellbeing before and after the support of 70+ Cymru.

Concurrent to the analysis we will continue to investigate funding streams that can support a Wales wide home energy service that challenges fuel poverty and improves energy efficiency for older people in Wales.



CLIENT STORIES

A New Heating System for Mr and Mrs Paul

Late in 2022, Mrs Paul contacted us in desperate need. She is the main carer for her husband (aged 64) who has multiple sclerosis. Mr Paul cannot leave his bed and cannot move independently. He had a heart attack in spring 2022 and was diagnosed with Alzheimers in autumn 2022.

Mr & Mrs Paul's boiler had been broken for a long time, their only source of hot water was a boiled kettle, their only source of warmth came from two plug-in heaters which were inappropriate, inadequate and expensive to run.

The couple receive a very low income and are too young to receive Pension Credit. They had a small savings pot to fund emergency respite care when needed. Mrs Paul initially spoke to our telephone-based HEO who conducted a Home Energy Telephone Assessment and established that Mr and Mrs Paul were in extreme financial hardship, dealing with multiple interconnected challenges that risked further poor health to both with extremely serious risks to Mr Paul's health.

They were barely able to manage to pay for basic warmth - the heaters they were using were inefficient and expensive. Gary, their HEO, arranged a home visit and further assessed Mr and Mrs Paul's home, needs and very limited options. They were ineligible for NEST help as their boiler was too young, were receiving the maximum benefits they could and were struggling to make them stretch to cover the costs of care, housing and utility bills.

Gary established that Mr and Mrs Paul were at great risk from a cold home, they had spent hundreds of pounds over a number of years on boiler repairs, and despite this it was completely broken. The boiler was out

of warranty, so Gary contacted the installer and manufacturer to check, and arranged for quotations from trusted contractors. After much research Gary found suitable benevolent funds, submitted a number of applications, including an application to the project's Redress crisis fund, and was successful in raising enough funding to cover the cost of a new, efficient heating system. One funder (Friends of the Elderly) doubled their offer from £325 to £650 to reflect the clients need. We have never experienced this before and it is confirmation of the exemplary applications Gary made.

Once funding was secured, Gary commissioned work with contractors and coordinated the work to ensure that it could be carried out at short notice (as soon as Mr Paul was well enough) and could be started and finished in one day to lessen the impact on Mr Paul and his carers.

Mr and Mrs Paul now have an efficient and reliable heating system that has seen them through the winter and continues to work well for them. 70+ Cymru has enabled Mr & Mrs Paul to be affordably warm and has taken some stress away from their difficult situation.

(Names have been changed to protect the individuals involved)

No Heating at Winter: Christine's Story

When Christine had oil delivered for her central heating, she thought she was ready for winter. Instead, she was shocked to discover that her oil tank was cracked and could not be refilled.

She didn't have the thousands of pounds needed to replace the oil tank and was facing a whole winter with no heating. Her pre-1860 home in rural Carmarthenshire was freezing, and she began to worry.

She started looking everywhere for help. "I'd spoken to so many different organisations and got nowhere" she said. "Sometimes a person would ring and say they would get back to you and then nothing."

As the months got colder, it was impacting her already existing health problems. "I used an open fire in the lounge and an electric heater in the bedroom, but because the way the house is, it was still freezing. I actually went to bed with a face mask on because it kept my nose warm!"

Then, Christine heard about Care & Repair and was put in touch with Wayne Hughes, Care & Repair's local Home Energy Officer. "He was totally and utterly amazing." Christine said. "I had gone through quite a lot of other options, and it was all 'No, we can't do that'. But with Wayne, he just didn't let it go, he didn't give up, he just kept going and going and going."

Wayne was happy to help, especially as he knew the financial burden a new oil tank can be. He explained, "The current regulations are that oil tanks must be double-bunded. So, to renew or replace is more costly because of this; £1200 just for the tank itself. And then there's moving the oil out, getting rid of the old one, making sure the base is level or renewing the base. And that wasn't even looking at the boiler!"

Wayne accessed the Care & Repair Winter Pressures Hardship Fund to fully cover the cost of the work, and by the end of January, the new oil tank had been installed. Wayne was able to inspect the work and ensure everything was in order so that Christine had her heating back on.

"It's absolutely amazing, I just can't believe that they did it" Christine said. "I've always been independent, and it's quite hard to ask for things, but Wayne didn't make me feel embarrassed about it. His whole attitude was just amazing."



MEET THE TEAM



Jo Harry 70+ Cymru, Project Manager



Wayne Hughes Home Energy Officer, Carmarthenshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot



Sarah Penny Home Energy Officer, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan



Matthew Bell Home Energy Officer, Conwy and Denbighshire



Tina Williams Home Energy Officer, Gwynedd and Anglesey



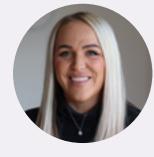
Mike Turfey Home Energy Officer, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion



Steve Cadwallader-Jones Home Energy Officer, Powys



Kam Chooyin Home Energy Officer, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil



Rhian Cook Home Energy Officer, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport

How I made a Difference as a HEO

"I joined the team in January 2022 to offer a telephone-based version of the 70+ Cymru project for the residents of Conwy and Denbighshire. The drastic rise in fuel prices shortly afterwards gave rise to numerous enquiries from people scared and confused about how to manage the heating in their homes in cost effective ways.

"Thanks to the pooled knowledge and resources of the 70+ Cymru team I was able to provide information assistance across a wide variety of enquiries. Some people just needed general advice on reducing condensation or improving the energy efficiency of their home, others needed details of local contractors. Many were concerned about the age of their boilers, leading to when or even if they should update them. Some people simply needed to know which heating grants existed, others needed help applying to those grants such as NEST or ECO-FLEX. The long delay in rolling out ECO-4 during 2022 led to confusion and uncertainty and residents relied on us for updates and guidance as to what choices to make in their homes.

"The biggest impact we've had is on those people who lacked the financial resources to repair heating systems but for whatever reason did not qualify for the usual grants. I was able to apply on their behalf to other, smaller charities as well as utilise the support of government grants for Gas Safety, not to mention the 70+ Cymru Hardship fund itself. These cover both fully funded and partially funded installations, depending on the householder's circumstances. In one case a bedbound man with multiple sclerosis had been without mains heating or hot water for nearly two years. Thanks to our intervention a new boiler was fully funded and installed before the winter of 2022.

"The 70+ team met regularly online to share knowledge and experiences; it is clear the enormous impact we've had on many people's lives across the whole of Wales. My knowledge of energy efficiency, building structure, heating systems, grants and more has improved dramatically during my time with 70+ Cymru. I look forward to the opportunity to help more people on similar schemes in the future, as people's need for reliable impartial information and advice on keeping their homes warm and safe has never been greater."

Matthew Bell, Home Energy Officer, Conwy and Denbighshire



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Heartfelt thanks to the funders who enabled 70+ Cymru to happen. Firstly, the funding team at EST that runs OFGEM's **Energy Redress Fund. Thank you OFGEM for** supporting projects like 70+ Cymru across Wales and the rest of the UK. Secondly, to Tom Robinson and Nigel Winnan of Wales & West Utilities for enabling the continuation of the project over the challenging winter of 2022/23 between 1 December 2022 and 31 March 2023.

We are extremely grateful to the Care & Repair Agencies for supporting the project and for integrating the Home Energy Officers into their teams.

Huge thank you to Solon and NEST for the donations of small energy efficiency measures. Thank you also to Gary Braybrooke and the team at Energy Efficiency Awards for recognising the impact the 70+ Cymru team had.

The fuel poverty movement in Wales is strong and we value the support and partnership we have received from many organisations who gave us a platform to share our concerns and discuss potential solutions. We thank Ben Saltmarsh at NEA, Dylan McLellan and Peter Hughes at NEST, the DAF team, Jody Perkins and Euan Hampton from Welsh Water, Amal and Mahanaz and the team at Women Connect First, Yvonne Peters and the members of Llantrisant 50+ Forum, Llyr Randles and the Affordable Warmth Partnership, Community Voluntary Councils across Wales and the many partnerships we have formed.





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